

APPENDIX D: PUBLIC COMMENTS AND FOREST SERVICE RESPONSE.

Following is an index of the comments and responses sorted into common issues (**Issue**) and questions/comments (ie *1. Question*). The commenter and comment letter are in parentheses before each specific comment addressed by the question and response. For example: (1a) refers to commenter #1, comment a. The list of commenters is in Appendix D and a list of comments grouped by commenter and issue can be found in the project record.

Issues	Questions
Rodenticides	1-5
Shooting Restrictions (more)	6-8
Shooting Restrictions (less)	9-14
Associated species	15-17
Ferret Reintroduction (For)	18-22
Ferret Reintroduction (Against)	23-28
Soils/Erosion/Noxious Weeds	29-30
Visual Barriers and Buffer Zones	31-34
Impacts to Private Landowners	35-39
Plague	40-43
Plague Management/Dusting	44-45
National Grasslands Intent/Management	46
Treatment Around Residences	47
Private Property Rights	48
Impacts to Permitted Grazing	49-51
Impacts to Other Land Uses	52
Good Neighbor Rhetoric	53
Adjacent Landowners Use of Rodenticide	54-56
Prairie Dog Populations and Viability	57-58
Federal Spending and Costs	59-61
Science/Peer Review	62-63
Minerals	64-66
Monitoring /Adjusted Grazing/Adaptive Mgt	67-68
Collaborative/CCAAs Landowners	69-71
Range of Alternatives	72
Additional Alternatives	73-81
Prairie Dog Petition for Listing	83-84
Category 1 (size, location, boundary, tools)	85-90
Boundary Management	91
Active/Proactive Management/Translocation	92-97
Competition for Forage	98-100
Caps	101
Amendment Scope	102
Flexibility in Use of Tools	103
Cumulative Impacts	104
Specific Comments or wording changes	105-125

Rodenticides

1. Rodenticide Use should be prohibited. (8b) (8n) (8aa) (8ll) (9c) (10r) (10s) (10bb) (10ii) (11h) (19f) (26-85, 87-171, 173-314)

Forest Service Response: The use of rodenticide is prohibited in Alternative 1-No Action, except for instances of public health and damage to facilities.

2. Poisoning is cruel and inhumane. (74-78, 137, 285, 287)

Forest Service Response: Prairie dogs are not a domestic species like dogs and cats; the BA/BE addresses the effects of rodenticide.

3. Rodenticide Use should be justified and limited. (7a) (7c) (7d) (8ii)

Forest Service Response: Use of rodenticide, including limitations, is described in Alternatives 2 and 5. Additional limitations are included in Alternative 4. Each alternative has a decision screen (Appendices B-B4) which describes how and when each management tool would be used.

4. Rodenticide use is the only workable method and should be used proactively to provide adequate control. (20l) (20x) (25d) (25f)

Forest Service Response: Rodenticide use, at varying levels, is included as a management tool in Alternatives 2-5. Each alternative has a decision screen (Appendices B-B4) which describes how and when each management tool would be used.

5. Don't limit rodenticide to Zinc Phosphide change to any approved rodenticide (ie. Rozol). (1n) (3f) (14c) (15a) (16g) (18c) (19j) (20s) (20w) (21a) (22c) (23b) (24b) (25a)

Forest Service Response: Currently, only zinc phosphide is approved for use on the TBNG. Due to the lack of information regarding the impacts of Rozol, or other rodenticides that could be approved in the future, they are not included in the Alternatives analyzed. Should more information become available regarding Rozol or other rodenticides at a later date, analysis of the impacts would be completed at that time.

Shooting Restrictions (more)

6. Shooting restrictions should be expanded. (8e) (8r) (8aa) (10s) (10kk) (26-85, 87-171, 173-314)

Forest Service Response: This issue is discussed in the alternatives. The article written in reference to the UW study is used as a reference in the BA/BE. Shooting effects are discussed in the BA/BE. The Proposed Action (Chapter 1) also addresses the effects of shooting.

7. Shooting should not be allowed in Category 1. (MA 3.63). (6m) (8y) (8zz) (10i)

Forest Service Response: Shooting is not currently allowed in the MA 3.63 and it is not allowed in Category 1 in any of the action alternatives.

8. Shooting in Categories 2, 3 & 4 should be specified to levels low enough to not trigger responses or should be prohibited entirely. (6n) (10p) (10ccc)

Forest Service Response: Shooting would not be allowed in Category 2 areas on NFS lands in any of the alternatives. Shooting impacts would be monitored on Category 3 & 4 colonies and if excessive impacts are observed shooting could be prohibited if necessary.

Shooting Restrictions (less)

9. Shooting restrictions should be eliminated. (1i) (18h) (20dd)

Forest Service Response: All alternatives currently have shooting restrictions. These restrictions were put in place in 2003, following the plague event. If monitoring showed that these restrictions are no longer needed to maintain prairie dogs within the MA 3.63, these restrictions could be lifted.

10. Shooting is a management tool. (2j) (2s)

Forest Service Response: Shooting is currently available as a management tool on colonies outside of the MA 3.63 and would continue to be available in all alternatives in varying levels.

11. (2n) Also has the shooting restriction actually benefited the PD?

Forest Service Response: Pauli and Buskirk (2007b) shows that shooting pressure decreases fitness of prairie dogs and therefore, it is believed that the shooting restriction has increased fitness in those prairie dogs remaining after plague. Due to the interactions with plague, there is no data showing the direct benefits of the shooting restriction to prairie dogs.

12. The Forest Service should develop a recreational shooting plan. (2t) (2ff)

Forest Service Response: The Wyoming Game and Fish Department has jurisdiction over harvest of wildlife species. However, the Forest Service could develop a recreational shooting plan which would highlight areas where shooting is desired as management tool.

13. Shooting should be allowed in areas outside of Category 1 including Category 4 colonies and even within Category 1 if the numbers get too high.(18g) (25e)

Forest Service Response: Shooting is currently allowed on areas outside of Category 1 and 2 including Categories 3 & 4. If monitoring showed that these restrictions are no longer needed to maintain prairie dogs within the Category 1, these restrictions could be lifted. This would require additional environmental analysis and a separate decision.

14. The “No Shooting Area” should not be increased. (20cc) (22f)

Forest Service Response: Alternative 1 and 3 does not increase the “No Shooting Area.”

Associated species

15. Prairie dogs are a keystone species and have contributed to the development of the grassland ecosystem. (6d) (7e) (8ww) (9o) (10v) (26-85, 87-171, 173-314)

Forest Service Response: Both the range of alternatives (Chapter 2), Environmental Consequences (Chapter 3) and the BA/BE address this issue.

16. The FEIS should analyze and disclose impacts to biodiversity, species associated with prairie dogs including black-footed ferret, mountain plover, swift fox, ferruginous hawk, burrowing owl and golden eagle. (5g) (7g) (10t) (10u) (10w) (10x) (10y) (10z) (10aa) (10ww) (10f) (11m) (26-85, 87-171, 173-314)

Forest Service Response: BA/BE and the Wildlife Section of Chapter 3 analyzes all impacts to the aforementioned species.

17. (19d) The only reason some people think some of these species [burrowing owls, ferruginous hawks and swift foxes] are ‘dependent’ on prairie dogs, is because it is much easier to spot them on the bare ground in a dog town.

Forest Service Response: There has been a lot of research regarding the dependence of other species on prairie dogs including diet analysis, in addition to observations, that confirms the associations of many species with prairie dog colonies.

Ferret Reintroduction (For)

18. The Thunder Basin management plan should maximize the likelihood of a successful ferret recovery on this national grassland. (5h) (6f) (6g) (8a) (8g) (8xx) (9l) (10c) (16b)

Forest Service Response: The Thunder Basin National Grassland Land and Resource Management Plan identified the MA 3.63 as potential habitat for a black-footed ferret reintroduction. The alternatives maintain this MA 3.63 at the same size or larger than described in the no action alternative and it also takes into consideration local concerns regarding a ferret reintroduction.

19. (8qq) This Proposed Action is not specific about black-footed ferret reintroduction.

Forest Service Response: The proposed action does not include a black-footed ferret reintroduction. The specific details regarding a reintroduction are determined in consultation with the USFWS and the Wyoming Game and Fish and are outside the scope of this decision. The USFS is a party to the national recovery plan and the USFS is committed to help reintroduce ferrets on the TBNG when the USFWS is ready to do so and prairie dog populations are adequate to support a reintroduction.

20. (3a) We suggest that the final EIS discuss the factors that have caused the decline of the black-footed ferrets throughout its range and led to its endangered status.

Forest Service Response: The BA/BE provides a more detailed discussion concerning black-footed ferrets as it relates to prairie dog management.

21. How many acres of prairie dogs are needed for Ferret Reintroduction?
(5f) (6j) (8f) (10e) (11n) (14b)

Forest Service Response: A discussion of the amount of prairie dog colonies in acres is described in Chapter 3 of the FEIS.

22. Black-footed ferrets should be reintroduced as an essential experimental population
(8dd) (10cc)

Forest Service Response: The determination of the black-footed ferret during future releases is made by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and is outside the scope of this decision.

Ferret reintroduction (against)

23. Is ferret reintroduction possible/feasible? (1a) (1h) (2g) (2dd)

Forest Service Response: The determination of the feasibility of a future black-footed ferret reintroduction is made by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and is outside the scope of this decision.

24. (1b) If ferrets are introduce[d] here, would that require ferret searches before landowners could do any P.D. control?

Forest Service Response: The determination of the need for black-footed ferret searches following a future reintroduction is made by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and is outside the scope of this decision.

25. (2cc) Of course it is expected that the ferret population will expand, but at what rate? What is the target population of Black-footed ferrets on the Thunder Basin National Grasslands? What were the historic numbers of ferrets in the Thunder Basin? Is there any historic or recent documentation of any Black-footed ferrets on the Thunder Basin? Can the ferret actually survive without captive breeding and continuous reintroduction into selected areas?

Forest Service Response: The determinations concerning target populations of black-footed ferret and their survival during future releases is made by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and is outside the scope of this decision. There is one documented find of a black-footed ferret skeleton on TBNG, there are no current or recent documentation of black-footed ferrets on TBNG and the USFWS has provided block clearance for ferret surveys in this part of Wyoming.

26. We feel it is a great waste of taxpayers money to continue to attempt to create a black-footed ferret reintroduction area
(18d) (19i)

Forest Service Response: The determination about how money is spent in regard to a future black-footed ferret reintroduction is made by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and is outside the scope of this decision. Currently the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and Forest Service policy requires the Forest Service to provide for recovery of any species listed under ESA.

27. (20a) The ferret should not be ‘introduced’ in the Thunder Basin National Grasslands.

Forest Service Response: The determination about where reintroductions of black-footed ferrets occur is made by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and is outside the scope of this decision.

28. Ferret reintroduction should be limited to a minimum level. (1c) (20aa)

Forest Service Response: The determination of a future black-footed ferret reintroduction is made by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and is outside the scope of this decision.

Soils/Erosion/Noxious Weeds

29. Prairie dogs increase soil erosion and noxious weeds.
(1e) (2i) (2p) (2bb) (14a) (15g) (15j) (16e) (19b) (20k) (25b)

Forest Service Response: These issues are addressed in Chapter 3 of the EIS (Range and Soil).

30. No Evidence of Soil Erosion. (7h) (9b) (11l)

Forest Service Response: These issues are addressed in Chapter 3 of the EIS (Range and Soil).

Visual Barriers and buffer zones

31. Visual Barriers are ineffective. (1g) (1j) (2m) (2o) (2ee) (15d) (18b) (20i) (20p) (22a) (25g)

Forest Service Response: A full discussion of the effectiveness of visual barriers is found in the FEIS.

32. (3c) We recommend that issues that pertain to the efficacy of visual barriers to control prairie dog colony expansion be specifically discussed in the final EIS.

Forest Service Response: A full discussion of the effectiveness of visual barriers is found in the FEIS.

33. Fencing to create buffers is not allowed in LRMP. (19e) (20q)

Forest Service Response: The LRMP does not preclude the use of fences for management objectives. However, it in the Broken Hills and Upton Osage Geographic Areas have an infrastructure objective to "Increase pasture size as opportunities arise over the next 15 years." Cellers Rosecrans Geographic Area has an infrastructure objective, "The landscape is dominated by large pasture size." Spring Creek Geographic Area has an infrastructure objective to "Maintain or increase average pasture size in Management Areas 3.65 and 4.32." Therefore, if new fences are constructed that reduce pasture size in these areas, there may need to be other fences or exclosures removed.

34. Buffer zone is Bad Science. (20f) (20ee)

Forest Service Response: A discussion of the use of ungrazed buffer zones, prescribed grazing and vegetative barriers can be found in Chapter 3 of the FEIS.

Impacts to Landowners

35. Economic Impacts to Private Lands and ranching from prairie dog infestations should be discussed in more detail.(1k) (2a) (2f) (15h) (17b) (17c) (21b) (22b)

Forest Service Response: Discussion regarding the impacts to private lands and ranching is discussed in Chapter 3 of the FEIS (Social and Economics)

36. Private property values are greatly reduced by prairie dogs. (19a) (20c)

Forest Service Response: These alternatives do not restrict the ability to poison or shoot prairie dogs on private lands and is outside the scope of the project. Forest Service regulation does not allow for the use of Federal funds off of Forest Service lands. In addition, depredation from wildlife is within the jurisdiction of the Wyoming Game and Fish.

37. (16a) [Good] "Attempting to implement the Good Neighbor Policy with respect to unwanted prairie dogs on adjacent landowners"

Forest Service Response: This is part of the purpose and need for the proposed action.

38. The Forest Service has not been a good neighbor and this proposal is inadequate to meet the goal of being a good neighbor. (20d) (20e) (20g) (20h) (20v)

Forest Service Response: FS has addressed this issue in the range of alternatives, (Chapter 3) foreseen effects, design criteria, monitoring, and mitigation.

39. There should be monetary compensation for private landowners affected by prairie dogs.
(20b) (20m)

Forest Service Response: These alternatives do not restrict the ability to poison or shoot prairie dogs on private lands and is outside the scope of the project. Forest Service regulation does not allow for the use of Federal funds off of Forest Service lands. In addition, depredation from wildlife is within the jurisdiction of the Wyoming Game and Fish.

Plague

40. (1o) There is mention of ‘containing plague’, with no discussion of how or if this could actually be done.

Forest Service Response: There are many methods being utilized to reduce the effects of plague to prairie dogs and black-footed ferrets. These include dusting, vaccination and control of mammals that can carry plague. The effectiveness and cost of these methods have been described in the EIS.

41. (2h) It is our contention that the PD numbers will cycle and crash every 5 or 6 years now that the plague is with us.

Forest Service Response: Research within the TBNG and other plague affected areas shows prairie dogs have a varied response to plague events. There is no statistical evidence to make conclusions on how prairie dogs may react to plague events on the TBNG in the future.

42. (2k) ...PD populations do rebound from a plague event, but at lower numbers before the next event. Does this indicate that to maintain a stable population and avoid a plague die off, PD numbers must be managed at a lower level to be viable?

Forest Service Response: Research within the TBNG and other plague affected areas shows prairie dogs have a varied response to plague events. There is no statistical evidence to make conclusions on how prairie dogs may react to plague events on the TBNG in the future.

43. (15f) So why is 48,000 acres ‘needed’ in the Thunder Basin? The reason given is the periodic episodes of sylvatic plague. The above report [CBSG 2004] suggests managing the effects of plague through ongoing human intervention and management, not by having larger areas.

Forest Service Response: At the time that the CBSG, 2004 report was written the Conata Basin site had not experienced plague. Human intervention activities such as dusting and vaccination were being used as a preventative measure. These methods are considered and included in each of the alternatives. Further details on the effectiveness and costs of these

methods can be found in the EIS. Some literature (Hoogland, 2006) suggests that spacing and size of the areas may manage the effects of plague.

Plague Management/Dusting

44. The EIS should include discussion about the impacts of plague and strategies to address plague. (6c) (7f) (8bb) (8q) (8v) (10ee) (10mm)

Forest Service Response: Dusting was analyzed in the Environmental impact Statement. The issue of immune response is outside the scope of the project.

45. (20z) The USFS should not be caught up in vaccination of prairie dogs for plague and or ‘dusting for fleas’.

Forest Service Response: This issue is outside the scope of this decision. The USFWS and the USFS will determine the appropriate management tools needed to provide for black-footed ferrets and prairie dogs. Vaccination is not currently available for prairie dogs.

National Grasslands Intent/management

46. The Forest Service should manage the Thunder Basin National Grasslands for a sustainable grassland agriculture economy as it was intended. (1f) (2d) (2q) (20bb) (172)

Forest Service Response: The Bankhead Jones Farm Tenant Act of 1937 (Amended in 1962, 1966, and 1981) is the primary enacting legislation for establishment of the Land Utilization Projects (LUPs) which were designated as National Grasslands in 1961. Title III of the act resulted in the establishment of the LUPs. While the preamble does mention a purpose “to promote more secure occupancy of farms and farm homes, to correct economic instability resulting from some present forms of farm tenancy...” Title III, Section 31 (as amended) provides the purpose of the LUPs, now grasslands, as follows:

“The Secretary is authorized and directed to develop a program of land conservation and land utilization, in order thereby to correct maladjustments in land use, and thus assist in controlling soil erosion, reforestation, preserving natural resources, protecting fish and wildlife, developing and protecting recreational facilities, mitigating floods, preventing impairment of dams and reservoirs, developing energy resources, conserving surface and subsurface moisture, protecting the watersheds of navigable streams, and protecting the public lands, health, safety, and welfare, but not to build industrial parks or establish private industrial enterprises.”

Title III did not (in 1937) and currently (as amended) does not mention agriculture, ranching, or livestock grazing.

Treatment around Residences

47. All land w/in a mile of residences should be continually treated to prevent health hazards. (1p) (25c)

Forest Service Response: All alternatives allow for treatment of prairie dogs to protect public health.

Private Property Rights

48. Encroachment on private property violates property rights. (2b) (2v)

Forest Service Response: These alternatives do not restrict the ability to poison or shoot prairie dogs on private lands and so this issue is outside the scope of the project. Forest Service regulation does not allow for the use of Federal funds off of Forest Service lands. In addition, depredation from wildlife is within the jurisdiction of the Wyoming Game and Fish.

Impacts to Permitted Grazing

49. (2c) Livestock grazing is a legitimate right that existed prior to forest reserves...

Forest Service Response: Holding a grazing permit is a privilege not a right.

50. Prairie dogs reduce forage availability for livestock. (2e) (2i) (2p) (2aa)

Forest Service Response: Discussion about impacts from prairie dogs to forage availability for livestock is found in Chapter 3 of the FEIS (Wildlife and Range).

51. Prairie dogs have detrimental economic effects to grazing permittees including reduced AUM's and livestock losses of cattle and horses. (15g) (15i) (15k) (17a) (17d) (19c) (20n)

Forest Service Response: Discussion regarding reduced AUM's for permitted grazing can be found in Chapter 3 of the FEIS (Range). The LRMP FEIS discussed outputs for livestock grazing based on the mix of structure and seral stages prescribed in the LRMP including short structure anticipated with prairie dog colonies.

Impacts to other land uses

52. Prairie dogs can cause impacts to other land uses. (23a) (24a)

Forest Service Response: Impacts to grazing and other land uses have been addressed in the EIS (Chapter 3-Range and Minerals).

Good Neighbor Rhetoric

53. The good neighbor rhetoric that you talk about is just political pressure by ranchers to poison prairie dogs. (8vv) (9b) (9d) (9i) (9m) (11a)

Forest Service Response: 36 CFR 219, Decisions and conclusions are based on a review of the record that shows a thorough review of relevant scientific information, a consideration of responsible opposing views, and the acknowledgment of incomplete or unavailable information, scientific uncertainty and risk.

Adjacent Landowners Use of Rodenticide

54. (10j) Adjacent landowners are permitted to, of their own free will, use whatever means are legally at their disposal to control or eliminate prairie dogs on their own private lands once the prairie dogs leave public lands.

Forest Service Response: The Forest Service does not have authority over private land owners or their property. 36 CFR 261.9f prohibits people from using pesticides, except for personal use of bug spray on public lands.

55. (10pp) How many of these landowners in Category 1 or Category 2 areas, who are committing to maintaining prairie dogs, have never poisoned prairie dogs, or have stopped poisoning prairie dogs having realized that the cost of poisoning outweighs any possible advantage that can be gained by having a little extra grass available for their livestock?

Forest Service Response: The Forest Service does not have authority over private land owners or their property. Poisoning on private lands is not a matter of public record, however, many of these landowners have expressed their past history and intent to poison outside of this agreement. One landowner has entered into a CCAA with the USFWS for private lands within one of the Category 2 areas.

56. (10qq) Or are these landowners who have poisoned prairie dogs for years and will now cease?

Forest Service Response: The Forest Service does not have authority over private land owners or their property. Poisoning on private lands is not a matter of public record, however, many of these landowners have expressed their past history and intent to poison outside of this agreement. One landowner has entered into a CCAA with the USFWS for private lands within one of the Category 2 areas.

Prairie dog populations and Viability

57. What populations are needed to maintain prairie dog viability?
(2l) (2r) (2y) (2z) (3h) (5b) (15e)

Forest Service Response: Population counts vary by area and are discussed in the BA/BE.

58. Explain the prairie dog population data presented in the DEIS. (8h) (9e)

Forest Service Response: The data presented indicates that populations have fluctuated since the plague epizootic in 2002. The pattern is expected during plague events. The most recent years (2006-2008) show a stabilizing population.

Federal Spending and Costs

59. Cost for poisoning should not come from taxpayers. (2u) (9j) (9k) (10uu)

Forest Service Response: Forest Service, weed and pest, the grazing association, and APHIS are included in the funding sources for this project. The management standards and guidelines and existing laws and regulations will be met via the Proposed Action.

60. Public land grazing is really a financial disaster. (11b) (11c) (11d) (11e)

Forest Service Response: The public land grazing fees are set by Congress and are outside the scope of this decision.

61. What are the impacts to the government's deficit spending on the economy?
(11f) (11g)

Forest Service Response: The deficit spending of the federal government is determined by Congress and is outside the scope of this decision.

Science/Peer Review

62. The DEIS is heavily influenced by an un-published document by Gunnar Carnwath.
(2w) (7j) (9h) (10m)

Forest Service Response: The strategy did incorporate portions of the unpublished document by Carnwath into the discussion. The information in the strategy referenced by Carnwath has been researched and revised as needed. The analysis of the effects in the DEIS did not include references to Carnwath.

63. There are scientific and data weaknesses in the document. The document needs to incorporate the best available science. (7i) (7k) (9a) (10ss)

Forest Service Response: Additional literature review has been incorporated into the FEIS.

Minerals

64. (3i) We therefore suggest that a more in-depth discussion of potential mineral development and affects on prairie dog populations and habitat be included in the final EIS.

Forest Service Response: An analysis of existing mineral leasing and development has been included in the FEIS and impacts from existing mineral development and reasonably foreseeable future development has been included in the cumulative effects.

65. Changes should be made in standards and guidelines for Mineral development to reduce impacts to prairie dogs. (10gg) (10hh)

Forest Service Response: Since the development of the TBNG LRMP, no new mineral development has been completed including the stipulations as outlined in the LRMP. Therefore, we have not been able to monitor the effectiveness of the existing standards. Mineral policy requires that stipulations only be set at the level needed to provide the protection needed. Therefore, no changes in the standards are included in these alternatives.

66. The EIS needs to disclose impacts to oil and gas leasing and development from the changes in the plan. (12_13a-12_13f, 86)

Forest Service Response: There is discussion of the effects of the alternatives on minerals operations included in Chapter 3 of the FEIS. The proposed action is guided by the management plan and existing laws and regulations.

Monitoring /Adjusted Grazing/Adaptive Mgt

67. Explain how monitoring and adjusted grazing would occur. (3k) (7b)

Forest Service Response: Adjusted grazing and monitoring will be implemented according to the Thunder Basin Analysis Area, Inyan Kara Analysis Area and Spring Creek Geographic Area Vegetation Analyses to meet the desired vegetative conditions. Monitoring of prairie dog colonies will be conducted annually.

68. (6i) Given the presence of plague in Thunder Basin, we recommend an adaptive management approach toward establishing the minimum (not maximum) complex size to maintain a viable population of ferrets.

Forest Service Response: The strategy is designed to work as an adaptive management approach, allowing the most appropriate tools to be used on a site specific basis.

Collaborative/CCAAs/Landowners

69. We support the use of CCAAs or other agreements with private landowners to manage prairie dogs on private land. (3b) (8d)

Forest Service Response: The strategy incorporates private lands to provide a landscape approach to management with the appropriate agreements. The Forest Service is pursuing a CCA for management on NFS lands.

70. How will monitoring on private lands be completed to ensure compliance with the plan?
(10h) (10rr)

Forest Service Response: Monitoring on private lands will be completed in compliance with Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances with the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

71. (16f) [Good] “Represents a collaborative effort between Federal and State agencies and private landowners.”

Forest Service Response: The Forest Service recognizes the collaborative effort that went into this strategy and the value of working together toward a common goal.

Range of Alternatives

72. The EIS must include a full investigation and consideration of a range of reasonable alternatives. (5a) (10ll)

Forest Service Response: The Forest Service has added two additional alternatives in the FEIS to respond to specific comments. This has broadened the range of alternatives.

Additional Alternatives

73. (5c) EPA would also like to see the FEIS analyze a non-lethal management alternative for managing black-tailed prairie dogs that is responsive to landowner concerns....

Forest Service Response: The Alternative 1 (No Action) limits the use of rodenticide to only two events, public health and damage to facilities. Shooting is currently prohibited on over 72,500 acres of NFS lands. A non-lethal management alternative is not responsive to landowner concerns and was not analyzed in detail.

74. (8t) Alternative 2’s proposed amendment changes #4 and 5 would amend the boundary of the black-footed ferret 3.63 management area; these changes would not reduce protections and in fact may lead to a slight improvement, but we feel these changes do not go far enough to expand the area in which prairie dogs should be fully protected and managed for maximum populations.

Forest Service Response: Alternative 4 provides a larger Category 1 (MA 3.63) and limits the use of rodenticide beyond what is described in Alternative 2.

75. Additional Category 2 Areas should be included. (8jj) (10aaa)

Forest Service Response: Alternative 5 includes three additional Category 2 areas.

76. (10ff) In the context of the plan amendment, additional conservation measures unrelated to the interests of grazing permittees should be considered in detail and implemented in the final decision.

Forest Service Response: Additional conservation measures that might be needed will be considered on a case by case basis as projects are proposed that might affect prairie dog habitat.

77. (10yy) In the absence of private inholdings in the heart of the Thunder Basin, there would be fewer issues surrounding prairie dog dispersal from public to private land. The tangle of public and private lands, even in the relatively contiguous federal land of the ferret reintroduction habitat, contributes to the problem, and having a highly interspersed public and private land ownership situation maximizes the mileage of the contact zone between public and private lands. As part of the forthcoming NEPA process, the Forest Service should study in detail land swaps with willing sellers modeled after the Dull Center Land Exchange to further consolidate federal ownership within the Congressionally designated boundaries of the Thunder Basin National Grassland.

Forest Service Response: Land exchanges are included as a management tool in all of the alternatives; however, land exchanges must include voluntary participation and are lengthy and complex processes.

78. (10ddd) It would be more biologically reasonable to identify geographically explicit boundaries for all Categories, rather than having these only for Category 1 and 2.

Forest Service Response: Explicit boundaries for Category 3 & 4 colonies were considered but dropped from further analysis because many of these colonies are located near intermingled private lands and are more spread out. This configuration makes it difficult to manage them in a geographically explicit way.

79. (18e) “The 1982 Prairie Dog Plan that included 5400 acres of retention areas scattered around the TBNG was even better than this alternative [Alternative 3].

Forest Service Response: The 1981 plan is referenced in the background as information in the EIS. This alternative was considered but was not analyzed in detail because it does not meet the purpose and need to maintain viable prairie dog populations.

80. (20y) USFS objectives should be to limit prairie dog population to 1960 levels and keep dogs on Forest Service ground.

Forest Service Response: This alternative was considered but was not analyzed in detail because it does not meet the purpose and need to maintain viable prairie dog populations.

81. (21c) “I request that you do not add this area [the area south of the Cheyenne River] into Category 1.”

Forest Service Response: This alternative was considered but was not analyzed in detail because one of the purposes of the land exchange was to provide for black-tailed prairie dog and black-footed ferret habitat.

82. (22e) “We ask that you treat the area south of the Cheyenne River as a Category 2 area.”

Forest Service Response: This alternative was considered but was not analyzed in detail because one of the purposes of the land exchange was to provide for black-tailed prairie dog and black-footed ferret habitat.

Prairie Dog Petition for Listing

83. Any decision on the proposed action should not be made until after the Fish and Wildlife Service determines whether or not the black-tailed prairie dog warrants listing as a threatened species. (5d) (6e) (10q) (9g)

Forest Service Response: The Forest Service has informally consulted the Fish and Wildlife Service on the proposed action and the possibility for developing a CCA to incorporate the strategy into an agreement with the USFWS.

84. (9f) “the black-tailed prairie dog qualifies under standard definitions as a ‘Sensitive Species’ and as a ‘Management Indicator Species.’ Furthermore, the stance taken by the US Fish and Wildlife Service is well justified in designating *C. ludovicianus* as ‘warranted for listing’ under the Endangered Species Act.

Forest Service Response: The black-tailed prairie dog has been analyzed as a Region 2 Sensitive Species and a Management Indicator Species. The black-tailed prairie dog is not currently designated as ‘warranted for listing’ under ESA.

Category 1 (size, location, boundary, tools)

85. What is the size of the Category 1 habitat and the prairie dog populations within it? (2x) (6h)

Forest Service Response: The size and configuration of the Categories is discussed in each alternative and compared in Appendix E.

86. The Category 1 boundary changes should include additional habitat and at a minimum provide for a fully protected area greater than the current 3.63 area. (8c) (8w) (8nn) (8oo) (8pp) (9n) (10g) (10jj) (10tt)

Forest Service Response: Alternative 4 was developed to include additional habitat in the MA 3.63.

87. The Category 1 boundary should be changed to reflect natural land boundaries. (16c) (22d)

Forest Service Response: Alternative 2 and 5 incorporated natural land boundaries into Category 1 wherever possible.

88. The use of rodenticide in Category 1 should be prohibited. (8l) (10b)

Forest Service Response: Alternative 1 prohibits rodenticide use in Category 1 (MA 3.63) except for instances of human health and damage to facilities. All alternatives limit the use of rodenticide in Category 1.

89. (8z) How many acres of potential habitat and recently occupied habitat are within the proposed new boundary?

Forest Service Response: The summary tables for each alternative and Appendix E describes the habitat by alternative.

90. The idea of leaving buffer zones around the borders of the Category 1 area ungrazed by livestock is a good one. (8ff) (8gg)

Forest Service Response: Each alternative has a decision screen (Appendix B) which provides guidance on the use of the appropriate tools depending on the situation and site specific location.

Boundary management

91. Poisoning should be limited to a reduced boundary mgt zone (ie. 350 or 500 meters or ¼ mile) (6k) (8k) (8ff) (10bbb)

Forest Service Response: Alternative 4 analyzes limiting the use of rodenticide to within ¼ mile of private land boundaries.

Active/Proactive Management/Translocation

92. Non lethal control methods should be used on Public lands. (5i) (6a) (6b) (8m) (10vv)

Forest Service Response: In accordance with CEQ 1502.14 1a. & 1b. and 40 CFR 1505.1e, the writers of this EIS considered a range of alternatives. Alternative4 has been added and translocation and dusting at various levels has been added to all of the alternatives.

93. Include mandatory active management actions to increase prairie dog acres. (8j) (8eee) (8yy) (64, 78)

Forest Service Response: Each alternative has a decision screen (Appendix B) which provides guidance on the use of the appropriate tools depending on the situation and site specific location.

94. Translocation should be used. (8hh) (8o) (8p) (8s) (8aaa) (10nn)

Forest Service Response: Translocation and other non-lethal methods are discussed in the strategy; it remains an option that will be considered. This issue is also addressed in the BA/BE.

95. (20j) In the Prairie Dog Collaborative Management Strategy Control Management, what is translocation to suitable areas?...Gathering dogs and moving them is cost prohibitive and makes no sense.

Forest Service Response: The costs related to prairie dog translocation have been included in the economics section of the FEIS.

96. (8ccc) Eliminating livestock grazing in areas where prairie dogs are not wanted will help create conditions unsuitable for prairie dog colonization.

Forest Service Response: Each alternative has a decision screen (Appendix B) which provides guidance on the use of the appropriate tools depending on the situation and site specific location.

97. (25h) Do alternative 2 but with a much more pro-active management approach.

Forest Service Response: The decision screens found in Appendix B provide guidance in the use of the appropriate management tools based on site specific situations.

Competition for forage

98. Competition for forage with livestock should not be considered a compelling reason for controlling prairie dogs. (8u) (8x) (8cc) (62-64, 66, 69, 77, 224)

Forest Service Response: Background and management direction is based on direction from the Grassland Plan and existing laws and regulations. Discussion regarding competition for forage is in the EIS.

99. The primary impact on grazing permittees at present is drought, not competition for forage with prairie dogs. (10dd)

Forest Service Response: The impacts from drought are discussed in Chapter 3 of the FEIS (Wildlife, Range).

100. Prairie dogs and cattle can actually be compatible species.
(11i) (11j) (11k)

Forest Service Response: The use of prescribed grazing is discussed in Chapter 3 of the FEIS.

Caps

101. We do not support artificial “caps” on acreage of occupied prairie dog habitat in the various zones identified for prairie dog conservation and recovery. (6i) (8i) (8kk) (8bb) (8ddd) (10o) (10oo) (10xx)

Forest Service Response: The numbers identified by category are objectives and potential triggers to consider alternative management actions, they are not caps or static targets. The range of alternative, design criteria, and monitoring, in the EIS, address this issue.

Amendment Scope

102. This Forest Plan Amendment should only apply to the TBGPEA area. (8mm) (10zz)

Forest Service Response: The Forest Service is managing under the direction of the Thunder Basin National Grassland Management Plan and in order to meet the objectives of the TBNG LRMP and to provide consistency in management across the TBNG the amendment has been applied across the entire TBNG.

Flexibility in Use of Tools

103. Allowing control methods to be used as appropriate for the circumstances rather than stipulating the use of lethal tools as a last resort. (14d) (15b) (23c) (24c)

Forest Service Response: Each alternative has a decision screen (Appendix B) which provides guidance on the use of the appropriate tools depending on the situation and site specific location.

Cumulative Impacts

104. Thunder Basin National Grassland must consider the cumulative impacts of the Proposed Action’s annual environmental effects (8rr) (8ss) (8tt)

Forest Service Response: Cumulative impacts from the proposed action, alternatives and other past, present and reasonably foreseeable future actions have been analyzed in the FEIS.

Specific Questions

105. (1d & 2gg) Why the Weston County Commissioners not listed as an agency consulted with?

Forest Service Response: The Weston County commissioners were included in the original scoping of the project, but were inadvertently left off the list in Chapter 4. This has been corrected.

106. (11) By the way, are not ranchers a ‘minority population’.

Forest Service Response: The Forest Service must use the minority populations as recognized by the federal government when considering impacts under Environmental Justice.

107. (1m) How does the conclusion that Alternative 3, at a cost of \$270,000 is more economical than 2 at \$27,000.

Forest Service Response: This was an error. The economic analysis has been updated and corrected in the FEIS.

108. Typographical or specific wording comments (3d) (3j) (3l) (5e) (10k) (10l) (15c) (18f)

Forest Service Response: Appropriate edits have been made in the FEIS. All known colonies have been mapped and are included in the BABE and in the EIS under Current and Historical Extent by Alternative. The language provides direction on how commenters may achieve standing under the appeal regulations and informs the public of the need to respond to stay involved in the process.

109. (3g) We also suggest that the final EIS address potential effects resulting from rodenticide use on water quality and aquatic species, including contaminant fate and transport.

Forest Service Response: Rodenticide would not be used near standing water or drainages, because prairie dogs are not commonly found near water bodies or rivers. Therefore, the impacts would be minimal. Aquatic species that are R2 sensitive species were evaluated and dropped from further analysis. Zinc phosphide if applied according to label directions should have no effect on water quality or aquatic species. (ie. “Do not apply zinc phosphide on wet, cold or windy days. Apply after snowmelt and thaw.”)

110. (8ee) We have been told that the southern “arm” of this area (Rothluetner area, 4,508 acres) will have a cap of 1,500 acres of active prairie dogs.

Forest Service Response: The strategy as described in Alternatives 2 and 5 does have a trigger point of 1500 acres for the acreage located south of the Cheyenne River due to the proximity to private residences.

111. (8uu) The Proposed Action must not conflict with legislation or policy.

Forest Service Response: All appropriate legislation and policy has been considered as a part of this analysis.

112. (10a) The proposed action would actually increase or allow an increase in prairie dog killing on USFS lands.

Forest Service Response: Yes, but there will also be an allowance for prairie dog maintenance and expansion on private lands. Translocation and other non-lethal tools will be used to minimize the use of lethal control.

113. (10d) Our concern is that the Service is failing to incorporate sound climate science (that nearly universally predicts long-term drought conditions for the TBNG region) in a manner that will avoid intensifying conflicts with ranchers and the rest of the public most of which supports the conservation on black-tailed prairie dogs and their colonies.

Forest Service Response: Drought is discussed in Chapter 3 of the FEIS (Wildlife and Range).

114. (10n) Given the fatal lack of clarity in the DEIS and the erroneous references which purportedly form the basis of the so-called "strategy," there is no way the DEIS reader or USFS decisionmaker could determine the environmental impacts of the "strategy"

Forest Service Response: Additional research and clarification has been included in the FEIS.

115. (16d) [Good] "Evaluate prairie dog management again when total acres of active prairie dog colonies expand to 35,000 acres."

Forest Service Response: This evaluation point is in the existing LRMP direction and is not changed in any of the alternatives.

116. (16h) [Bad] "The Rothleutner Allotment was supposed to have a 1500 acre maximum level for prairie dogs and it would remain a shooting area."

Forest Service Response: The strategy as described in Alternatives 2 and 5 does have a trigger point of 1500 acres for the acreage located south of the Cheyenne River due to the proximity to private residences.

117. (18a) "We feel that this whole document exaggerates the benefits of prairie dogs, while downplaying the harm that they do."

Forest Service Response: Both the benefits of prairie dogs for associated species and the impacts of prairie dogs to private lands and other uses on NFS lands are discussed in Chapter 3 of the FEIS.

118. (19g) Are the dog towns in the Shirley Basin, where ferrets have been reintroduced, listed on the table of dog complexes on page 43? Maybe named Casper South?

Forest Service Response: The prairie dog colonies in Shirley Basin are not included on the table or map of complexes because these figures only show information for black-tailed prairie dogs. The prairie dogs in Shirley Basin are white-tailed prairie dogs.

119. (19h) “Your statement that ‘Physical barriers are typically multistrand fences, including electric fence, which prairie dogs will approach but cannot physically penetrate,’ is flat out false and should be removed...”

Forest Service Response: The use of physical barriers has been shown to have some effectiveness in some areas. More specific discussion about these barriers can be found in Chapter 3 of the FEIS.

120. (19k) We believe that a 90% kill rate with zinc phosphide is probably too high.

Forest Service Response: Effectiveness of zinc phosphide can vary by area and treatment. Our research indicates that zinc phosphide averages to be about 75-85% effective with some sites having a 90% or better effectiveness depending on individual site conditions.

121. (19l) \$13.50/acre cost for treatment is too high unless this includes all your monitoring costs

Forest Service Response: Costs for chemical control with rodenticide vary by area depending on the costs for contracting and rodenticide. Our research indicates that costs average \$10-\$13.50 per acre.

122. (20o) Does landownership adjustment mean the USFS is willing to buy adjacent private lands?

Forest Service Response: The Forest Service can purchase adjacent private lands, depending on the availability of funding.

123. What are the impacts to sensitive and threatened plants? (3e) (20r) (20ff)

Forest Service Response: Impacts to sensitive and threatened plants are discussed in Chapter 3-Botany in the FEIS and in the Botany BA/BE in the project record.

124. (20t) The range of acres treated indicates treatment was done from 1997 to 2007. Where was this done?

*Forest Service Response: The table that indicated acres treated from 1997 to 2007 was an estimate of **possible** treatment based on the acres of active prairie dog colonies during those years. No treatment was completed during those years. Those tables have been removed from the FEIS to reduce confusion.*

125. (20u) Reference is made to a ‘decision tree’ in index. I do not find an index, let alone a ‘decision tree’.

Forest Service Response: The decision screens can be found in Appendix B (B1-B4).